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Ricky's dad: I'm telling truth now

He speaks of more abuse

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

October 18, 2006

LANSING -- After admitting that he told numerous lies to police and his family about what happened to his 7-year-old son Ricky in July 2005, Tim Holland testified at his wife's murder trial Tuesday that he was now being truthful.

"I want to come out into the light and tell the truth," Holland, 37, testified as tears flowed. "I stood by and did nothing when my son was abused, and now I'm going to prison for it. I don't want to ever see this happen again to any other child."

For several hours during two days last week and again Tuesday, Holland gave painfully detailed accounts of the alleged abuse of his adopted son.

Holland, a civilian counterintelligence analyst for the Army since May 2001, said that when he came home from work, he often found that his wife, Lisa Holland, now 33, had locked Ricky in the basement of the family's homes, first in Jackson and later near Williamston.

Sometimes, Tim Holland said, he simply opened the basement door and Ricky was standing there. Other times, he found Ricky tied up. Holland recalled one instance at the couple's home in LeRoy Township near Williamston in May 2005 when he found Ricky in a basement utility room, hands, feet and mouth bound with duct tape.

Lisa Holland's attorney Andrew Abood continued to highlight the discrepancies and outright lies from Tim Holland during the course of the investigation that began when Holland called 911 on July 2, 2005, to report that his son had run away. In fact, the boy had died the day before. Holland contends his wife struck the boy with a small tack hammer.

In all instances, Holland admitted lying because he was afraid of going to jail and losing his wife, his other four children and his home. He also said he feared his wife despite his combat training.

Abood asked Holland whether he had given the name Billy Blood Bones to the monster Ricky thought lived under his bed. Holland said he had, except that the name was Rawhide and Bloody Bones, from a story his grandmother had told him when he was a child. Holland said naming the monster helped calm Ricky's fears.

Under questioning by Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency, Holland told of a trip to



Tim Holland, 37, is testifying at his wife's murder trial.

Florida in the summer of 2003 when the family visited Sea World and bought an orange T-shirt. Police later found the shirt in a diaper bag in a closet at the home, cut into strips and bloodstained. Holland said he was afraid to take the kids back to Florida because his wife told him, "She would feed Ricky to the alligators or rent a boat and drop him off into the ocean."

And shortly before the family moved from Jackson to LeRoy Township in May 2005, they often drove Williamston Road between the towns, Holland said. On one trip, Lisa Holland pointed out a spot in a swampy area south of Dansville as "a good place to dump a body," he said.

On Jan. 27, 2006, Tim Holland led police to that spot. It was where he had left Ricky's body wrapped in a sheet inside garbage bags.

Holland said Ricky told him that his mother would lock him in his room whenever his father went to work or left for several days of Army training. That was why, Holland testified, Ricky still wore pull-up diapers at age 7, though he was potty trained when he came to them as a 3-year-old foster child in October 2000.

Holland said Lisa Holland made Ricky stand in one spot holding a bag of diapers over his head and that she falsely claimed to a Jackson child psychiatrist that Ricky was violent and hyperactive in a scheme to get more money from the state for providing foster care for the boy.

Holland also said that he, his wife and her father, Tom Taylor of Williamston, met to get their stories straight for police after reporting that Ricky had disappeared.

Ferency, who in court Tuesday referred to Tom Taylor as a conspirator, would not comment later on whether charges would be brought against others who may have known about Ricky's maltreatment and did nothing to stop it.

Toward the end of Tuesday's questioning, Ferency asked Holland why, after so many lies, the jury should believe him now.

"Because I stood before you to take responsibility for my role in my son's death," Holland said between sobs. "Because I know I'm going to prison. I just hope that Lisa will stand up and take responsibility for her actions."

The trial is in its fifth week before Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield. Prosecutors are expected to complete their case by the end of this week. Abood said he plans to call about five witnesses in Lisa Holland's defense. Jury deliberations could begin by the middle of next week.

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October 18, 2006

Ricky's father details cover-up

Husband testifies wife, father-in-law wanted to get 'stories straight' before going to police.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

LANSING -- Lisa Holland told her husband that she wanted the family to vacation in Florida so they "could feed Ricky to the alligators, or find a boat and drop Ricky into the ocean," according to testimony Tuesday by her husband, Tim Holland.

Tim Holland's testimony revealed more gruesome details of the adoptive mother's alleged abuses against the couple's 7-year-old son, as well as an allegation by Ingham County Assistant Prosecutor Michael Ferency that Lisa Holland's father, Tom Taylor, helped to cover up the child's murder.

Lisa Holland is charged with open murder and child abuse in Ricky's July 2005 death. Tim Holland pleaded to second-degree murder in exchange for testimony against his wife. The couple adopted Ricky through the state foster care system when he was 3.

Lisa Holland jotted notes on a yellow legal pad, occasionally glancing up at color photos of her slain child's bones projected on a large-screen TV in Ingham County Circuit Court.

The Williamston mother appeared unmoved by Michigan State Forensic anthropologist Todd Fenton's descriptions of fractures in Ricky's nose, cheekbone, shoulder blade and collarbone after his body was recovered from an Ingham County swamp in January.

According to Fenton, some of the fractures showed evidence of healing, indicating they were made at least two weeks before Ricky died on July 1, 2005.

In his last day of testimony for the prosecution, Tim Holland told jurors that his wife took Ricky's presents away at Christmas 2004 and hid them in the garage so the child couldn't play with them. The toys were in the garage when detectives came to interview the couple after Tim Holland reported Ricky missing over the July 4th weekend.

Tim Holland also pointed to scratches on Ricky's arm, and bruises on his mouth, in a photo taken at his 7th birthday party. He said they were made when Lisa grabbed and back-handed Ricky because he wanted to use the bathroom. "I did not try (to intercede) because it would have only made it worse for him."

Tim Holland described for the jury how he, Lisa and her father, Tom Taylor of Williamston, sat in the kitchen of the couple's Douglas Street home and talked about getting their "stories straight" before an interview with detectives on July 3, 2005.

"Her father told me to get my story straight with his daughter's," Tim Holland said. "We got our story on the same sheet of music."

Ferency, the assistant prosecutor, said Tom Taylor was "the equivalent of a co-conspirator" for helping the Hollands plot their cover-up. Outside the courtroom, Ferency would not say whether charges would be filed against Taylor. "It's still under investigation," he said.

Ferency asked Tim Holland why the jury should believe him, even though he has admitted repeatedly lying to detectives and to the judge.

"Because I'm standing before you now to take responsibility for my son's death," he replied, breaking into sobs. "I know I'm going to prison, and I just hope Lisa will stand up and take responsibility for what she did."

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Published October 18, 2006

Holland: Wife must admit role in death

Ricky's father testifies Lisa beat, confined child

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

With the jury restless Tuesday after a long morning of testimony, Assistant Prosecutor Mike Ferency asked admitted murderer Tim Holland one final question:

"After all the lies you told police ... why should we believe you now?"

Through sobs, Holland said, "Because I am standing here before you now to take responsibility for my role in my son's death."

Referring to his wife, he added: "I just hope Lisa will stand up and take responsibility for her actions."

Those emotionally charged words came as Lisa Holland's murder trial began its fifth week Tuesday. The Williamston woman is charged with murder and child abuse in the death of the couple's 7-year-old adopted son, Ricky.

Tim Holland in September pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in Ricky's death and agreed to testify against his wife.

In three days on the stand, Tim Holland has admitted lying repeatedly about the circumstances surrounding Ricky's July 2005 death and the subsequent cover-up.

What's next

- Lisa Holland's murder trial continues today before Ingham County Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield. A forensic pathologist is expected to testify.

TRIAL RECAP

Week 1, Sept. 18-22:

- In opening arguments, prosecutors say the case against Lisa Holland is about manipulation, deception and concealment. Defense attorneys counter the prosecution's key witness, Tim Holland, is not credible and his guilty plea was intended solely to protect himself.

- A Jackson County social worker testifies that in February 2001, Ricky said Lisa Holland tied him up at night. The social worker filed a report with Child Protective Services, but the report was not substantiated.

- Jackson school officials testify the Ricky they knew was not the same boy described and often disparaged by Lisa Holland.

- Testimony also reveals Ricky was removed from elementary school by his parents after it was determined he did not qualify for the special education services.

Week 2, Sept. 25-29:

- Investigators found tiny blood stains in several rooms of Tim and Lisa Holland's Williamston home, a state police forensic scientist testifies.

- A new portrait of Lisa Holland emerges in court: A loving mother who frequently called her family physician with child-rearing questions. But testimony also revealed a doctor last saw Ricky on Sept. 20, 2002.

- Lisa Holland's hairdresser testifies that as hundreds of people searched for Ricky in early July 2005, Holland told her "she just needed to go on with her life."

- A Williamston neighbor who lived across the street from the Hollands describes an incident in May 2005 when he found Ricky in his kitchen. "They don't want me anymore," the neighbor testifies Ricky said.

Week 3, Oct. 2-5

- A former Ingham County Jail inmate testifies Lisa Holland told her Ricky made her angry, so she threw a hammer at the boy's head. She then picked it up and hit Ricky again.

He only began to reveal the full details to investigators in September of this year, according to testimony.

Defense attorneys continued Tuesday to question Holland about variations in what he has told authorities.

"Anything Tim Holland says has serious questions of trustworthiness," Lisa Holland's co-counsel Andrew Abood said in court.

Florida trip

Tim Holland on Tuesday morning testified that in the summer of 2003, the family traveled to Sea World in Florida. There they bought the orange T-shirt authorities believe Ricky was wearing when he suffered a head wound that led to his death.

Tim Holland said his wife told him she wanted to go back, "So she could feed (Ricky) to alligators ... or rent a boat and drop him off in the ocean."

In a photograph from that vacation shown in court Tuesday, Ricky and Lisa are standing next to each other, with parrots perched on their shoulders.

It appears to be a typical vacation snapshot. But it is a stark contrast to Ricky's life in the Hollands' home as described by Tim Holland.

In both Jackson and Williamston, dating back to 2001, Ricky was locked in his bedroom at night and forced to wear pull-up diapers, Tim Holland said.

"Lisa didn't want him out of his room," he explained.

Tim Holland said Ricky once told him: "Anytime you leave, Dad, she locks me in my room."

He also described coming home from work and finding Ricky locked in the basement, sometimes with his hands and feet bound.

'I stood by'

Tim Holland said Lisa occasionally disciplined Ricky by hitting him in the face and back - wherever she could reach him - with a wooden spoon.

Cuts on Ricky's lips and a bruise on his forearm, depicted in a photograph taken around the boy's seventh birthday, happened after Lisa grabbed him by the arm and "back-handed him in the mouth," Tim Holland testified.

- A nurse at Ricky's Jackson elementary school testifies she reported suspected abuse to Child Protective Services at least twice.

- A second jail inmate testified Lisa Holland confessed to killing Ricky. But Holland's defense attorneys focus on how Tim Holland lied to investigators several times in the case, including in a Jan. 27 statement to police during which he told authorities Lisa killed Ricky by striking him with a hammer.

- A video-recorded interview of Lisa Holland talking with police is played for the jury, during which Lisa speculated her husband might tell police that she hit Ricky and that he then fell into a wall.

- A weekend interview with Tim Holland yielded new information about how Ricky died, prosecutors said. As a result, a forensic pathologist is expected to update the boy's cause of death. The revelation led the judge to postpone the trial a day.

Week 4, Oct. 9-12

- Prosecutors show a 2005 TV interview with Lisa and Tim Holland where the couple begs for the safe return of Ricky, trying to show the couple's statements after the boy was reported missing were nothing but a ruse.

- A forensic scientist testifies a T-shirt stained with Ricky's blood provides clues as to how he was killed. Most the blood - which probably came from a wound on the back or top of Ricky's head - either dripped from his hair or brushed against the shirt like a paintbrush, the scientist says.

- Tim Holland describes the last week of Ricky's life, saying the boy was in a near-catatonic state, not eating or drinking and often incapable of supporting his small body. He says he found Ricky's lifeless body in his bed the night of July 1, 2005. He describes how he hid the body that night in a marshlike area near Dansville.

- A day after Tim Holland described in vivid detail watching his 7-year-old son, Ricky, slowly die during the last week of June 2005, he admitted lying to investigators several times about what happened. He said he gave false statements because he feared losing his family. He said the lying got out of control, and he didn't know how to stop.

The reason she struck Ricky: He wanted to go to the bathroom, and she wouldn't let him, saying he couldn't be trusted to be alone.

Asked why he didn't intercede, Tim Holland said: "Because it would only make it worse for Ricky."

He said he first went to police in late January because he feared his wife was abusing Ricky's 4-year-old brother, who the couple also adopted.

"I was afraid everything was starting all over again," he said.

Tim Holland, who saw his doctor for a sprained ankle June 30, 2005 - the day before Ricky died - said he never mentioned his son's head injury to medical professionals because he was afraid of his wife.

"I stood by and did nothing while my son was abused," he said. "Now I'm going to prison for it."

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Slain boy's father defends his credibility

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

Associated Press

LANSING -- A man who said his wife killed their adopted son fought to defend his credibility Tuesday as the defense questioned discrepancies in his testimony and plea deal with prosecutors.

"I'm standing before you today to take responsibility," a tearful Tim Holland said when asked why the jury should believe him. "I want to come out into the light. ... I stood by and did nothing while my son was abused and now I'm going to prison for it. I don't want to ever see this happen again to any other child."

Ricky Holland vanished from his Williamston home, in July 2005. His adoptive parents said he had run away, sparking a nine-day search by 1,700 volunteers and hundreds of law enforcement and other officials.

But Tim Holland later led authorities to Ricky's body after telling them his wife struck the boy in the head with a hammer. He said he only helped dispose of the body.

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Toddler Found Wandering Along I-94

By Michael Rosenfield

Web produced by Sarah Morgan

October 18, 2006

Police were looking for answers after a toddler was abandoned along I-94, Tuesday evening.

A party at Chuck E Cheese in Roseville ended in confusion when a child went missing.

2-year-old Dominique was later spotted being dropped off on the highway at I-94 and Connor on Detroit's east side. A good samaritan pulled over and called police.

Unika Riley, Detroit Police, said, "They told me that they were behind a white Camaro. They observed the Camaro pull over on the side of the road, drop the little girl off in the street and take off."

The good samaritan followed the Camaro to Gratiot where the 911 dispatcher told them to stop following the car and bring the child to the police station.

Police had a man in custody, but said his story changed several times. They are trying to determine if he was a guest at the party or a stranger.

The 2-year-old girl that told police her name was "Little Mamma" was back with her parents, Wednesday.

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2-year-old Dominique was found wandering along I-94 Tuesday night after she disappeared from a party at Chuck E Cheese in Warren.



Brothers say they also were sex victims

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

By Kim Crawford

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FLINT - Ted and Tim Johnson watched with a sickening sense of deja vu as prosecutors unfolded a child pornography case against self-described youth pastor Paul L. Gagnon.

As Gagnon pleaded guilty last week to spying on teenagers with a computer-camera system and manufacturing child pornography, the Johnson brothers said the details of the case were all too familiar to them.

They say they were Gagnon's victims about three decades ago, and now wonder if they could have done more to stop him.

"I'm sad to say that I dropped the ball, but I had nothing to back me up, or so I believed," Tim Johnson, 44, of Montrose Township, says of not making complaints as a teenager against Gagnon. "And he got away with this stuff, for all this time."

"To see this guy, 30 years later doing the same thing to children, it's unbelievable," adds Ted Johnson, 42, of Flint. "I'm really angry."

The brothers are among at least a dozen people that prosecutors said have called them since Gagnon's case surfaced this summer, hoping they could provide authorities with information and testify about their past experiences with him.

Gagnon pleaded guilty to an eavesdropping charge and to eight additional charges for using his computer to possess and manufacture child pornography pictures.

Prosecutors said they found thousands of pictures of child pornography on his computer and video. In exchange for his plea, prosecutors agreed to end a forensic examination of his computer and not file more charges.

"We're talking about yellowing Polaroid pictures going back to 1974," said Genesee County Assistant Prosecutor Gladys Christopherson about Gagnon's collection.

Gagnon could have been charged with 1,500 counts of child pornography but it wouldn't have netted a longer jail term since the sentences would all run concurrently, said Genesee County Prosecutor David S. Leyton.

As it stands, the plea deal could land the 51-year-old Gagnon in prison for about 30 years.

Unlike the Catholic priest sex abuse scandal in which priests faced charges decades after their alleged crimes, Leyton said the statute of limitations likely ran out for Gagnon since it appears he never left the state.

"We looked very carefully at potential (criminal sexual conduct) cases," said Leyton.

There would also be problems trying to prove allegations dating back 30 years.

"Evidence is old and stale," said Leyton.

Gagnon was arrested in August after a teenager who worked for his remodeling and maintenance business discovered computer-linked cameras in a bathroom and bedroom used by teens who stayed at Gagnon's house on Flint's south side. Police seized that computer.

Then, relatives moving Gagnon's wife out of the house gave authorities more of Gagnon's computer discs, hard drives, cameras, film and videotapes containing thousands of child pornography images.

Gagnon's attorney, Erwin F. Meiers III, said he and Gagnon declined to comment on the Johnson brothers' allegations.

But in court last week, Meiers said the plea deal "was in everyone's best interest that this matter was resolved. There was a possibility other things could surface that would have led to him being charged with life offenses."

The Johnson brothers and Gagnon's ex-wife, Kathryn Montgomery of Vienna Township, say the details of Gagnon's case have brought back painful memories.

The Johnsons' mother, Jeanne Johnson of Montrose Township, was going through a bitter divorce when she contacted a youth agency to get a mentor for Tim. In the mid-1970s, Paul Gagnon, then 21, entered their lives when the agency assigned him to the family.

"I was about 14 and I was depressed because of what was happening with my parents' divorce," Tim Johnson said. "At first, as we got to know Gagnon, we'd go to the auto races every Saturday night, and we'd go bowling. It was pretty normal for a while."

But then Gagnon started asking the teenager to hug and kiss him, saying it was to show appreciation for Gagnon taking him places. Johnson said this made him uncomfortable, but Gagnon would angrily accuse him of being ungrateful.

Gagnon also started to ask him how he felt about drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. Johnson first resisted, but eventually shared in drinking and periodically smoking pot with Gagnon and Gagnon's cousin, who was about Tim's age. And Gagnon let the boys look at Playboy magazines he kept in the bathroom of his apartment.

Ted Johnson, then 12, sometimes hung out with his brother and Gagnon, and sometimes stayed overnight alone with Gagnon. Both brothers say Gagnon told them to wear undershorts to bed rather than pajamas, and he wanted them to take showers before they went to bed. And he liked to have pillow fights and wrestling matches with them, dressed in their underwear, and it excited Gagnon sexually, Ted Johnson said.

At one point, Jeanne Johnson introduced Gagnon, then 22, to one of her friends, Kathryn Montgomery, a 23-year-old single mom with a 3-year-old son. He and Montgomery married and lived in an apartment her parents owned on Fenton Road.

Montgomery said she discovered a typewriter case in a narrow walled area that separated the apartment's furnace from the rest of the living space. Inside were pictures of a teenaged cousin of Gagnon's in the shower, and pictures of nude young men clipped from magazines.

After Gagnon moved out of the Fenton Road apartment, Montgomery says her father discovered holes drilled through the bathroom walls. They were covered with surgical tape, and it appeared to her father it had been done so that the tape could be removed and replaced. A person standing or kneeling by these holes had a direct view of the shower and the toilet, she says.

Tim Johnson said he finally broke off his relationship with Gagnon, when he woke up one night to the sensation that his underwear was being pulled. When Johnson opened his eyes, he saw Gagnon was holding a bottle under his nose. Gagnon previously had told Johnson when he was about 13 that the bottle contained heart medicine.

"I pushed his hand away and asked him what he was doing, and he said I was having nightmares so he was just trying to help, to give me some of his medicine," Johnson said.

"I believe I was drugged," Ted Johnson said. "I remember staggering up to go to a floor drain that I knew was there, so I could throw up in it."

Court records indicate that Gagnon had no criminal record at the time he met the Johnson brothers. He was later arrested and charged with assault with intent to commit second-degree criminal sexual conduct in 1980, but the case appears to have been dropped after Gagnon was given a forensic examination. Who the alleged victim was and what relationship Gagnon had with the victim are unknown.

He served six months in federal prison after pleading guilty to defrauding his employer, the Sherman Williams Paint Co., in 1994. But other than that case, Gagnon didn't come to the attention of authorities until this summer.

Gagnon faces arraignment in Genesee Circuit Court later this month, where he must again plead guilty before being sentenced.

Journal staff writer Bryn Mickle contributed to this report.

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'High risk' man arraigned

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

GRAND RAPIDS TOWNSHIP -- A man described by the Northview Public Schools superintendent as a potential sexual predator was arraigned today on a charge of malicious destruction of property -- a misdemeanor that allegedly occurred while the 19-year-old was in a secure facility at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services. Superintendent Michael Stearns issued the warning after he heard the 19-year-old had been released from the secure facility and would be living in the school district. In court papers, a treatment team recommended the man be hospitalized in a locked security unit. He has not been charged with any sexual assaults, but his treatment evaluator said he poses a "high risk of sexual molestation of children and violence to others," according to court documents.

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Search for infant after social worker killed

HENDERSON, Ky. Kentucky authorities are searching for a nine-month-old boy who was abducted after a social worker who had taken the baby to his mother's house was found dead.

Police found the body of 67-year-old Boni Frederick at the house Monday after she failed to return to work.

Police say Frederick's injuries were caused by blunt force trauma and sharp instrument laceration.

Police are still searching for the missing boy, who was believed to be with his 33-year-old mother, Renee Terrell, and her 23-year-old boyfriend, Christopher Wayne Luttrell.

Terrell has a history of abuse charges against children, including charges of assault and endangering the welfare of a minor. The child had been taken from his mother when he was 13-days-old because of neglect.

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Article published Oct 18, 2006

State closes Plymouth child care center

By Brad Kadrich
Staff Writer

While a Canton foster mother faces a felony murder trial in the death of her 2-year-old foster daughter, the child care center where the girl spent much of her time has now been closed amid allegations center officials did not report signs of physical abuse.

State officials Monday ordered Childtime Learning Center in Plymouth to close its doors, suspending its license and announcing an intent to seek revocation as a result of "a recent investigation of a complaint regarding the day care center."

The complaint, made by former Childtime teacher Cher Majeske, involved the center's failure to report what Majeske said were signs of abuse on 2-year-old Allison Newman. Majeske claims she told her supervisor, who did not report the abuse to the state.

Allison Newman died Sept. 22 at Michigan Mott Children's Hospital. The Wayne County medical examiner ruled the cause of death as head trauma. Allison's foster mother, Carol Poole, has been charged with felony murder, child abuse and involuntary manslaughter in the case.

State Department of Human Services spokesperson Maureen Sorbet wouldn't comment further on the state's action, citing the ongoing nature of the case.

"There are a number of reasons for such an action," she said of the center's closing. "Generally, it's done to protect the children being cared for at the child care center."

State records show the center has had other problems. An employee was disciplined following a January complaint the staff member picked up a 3-year-old girl by the arm, causing an injury. The center was also investigated for having too many children being cared for by too few employees. Records show corrective action was taken by facility management.

Childtime officials said they conducted an internal investigation into Majeske's claims, but found no evidence to substantiate them. In a statement released by Childtime, officials said they are cooperating with the state.

"Childtime is committed to providing a safe environment and quality care to all of the children we serve," officials said. "The children are our top priority so we are taking the necessary steps to re-open our Plymouth location so that we can continue providing the high level of care that our families are accustomed to."

Sorbet said the center could appeal. If an appeal is made, it would be heard by an administrative law judge, who would make one of three recommendations to the director of Human Services: Continuance of the license suspension; revocation of the license; or overturning the original decision to suspend.

"The director of the department would decide what to do," Sorbet said. "If (Childtime) still wishes to appeal, they could take it to circuit court."

Childtime officials called the closure "unnecessary" and said it "has caused undue stress to the families we provide care for."

"It is important for children to have the reassurance of familiar surroundings, playmates and caring staff, especially at a time when they may still be coping with the loss of their friend Allison," officials said in their statement. "We hope to have this matter resolved quickly so we can re-open in a timely manner and continue to provide our children with the quality of care that our families have come to expect from Childtime."

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October 18, 2006

State shuts child care center

Plymouth site closes after employees fail to report abuse; foster mom charged in girl's death.

Oralandar Brand-Williams / The Detroit News

PLYMOUTH -- State officials shut down a child care center after an investigation found violations of rules requiring its workers to report child abuse or neglect.

The move Monday came amid allegations workers at Childtime Child Care Inc. in Plymouth ignored signs of abuse of 2-year-old Allison Newman, whose foster mother has been charged in her Sept. 22 death.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services, said the Michigan Office of Children and Adult Licensing issued an order calling for operations at the center to be suspended at 6 p.m. Monday. The order also cited the intent to seek revocation of the center's license as a day care facility.

"We do this to ensure the safety of the individuals in the different kinds of facilities," Sorbet said. Allison was at the center five days a week for several hours each day. The girl died Sept. 22 in the Canton Township home of her foster mother, Carol Ann Poole. Poole told police the toddler fell over a railing while Poole was swinging her.

At least one former worker at Childtime said she saw signs of physical abuse months before the girl's death and that the supervisors at the center failed to report the abuse to state officials as required by law.

The former Childtime employee, Cher Majeske, told The Detroit News for a story Oct. 11 that she had seen bruises and scratches on Allison while she was working at the facility.

"(The supervisor) never even looked at Allison to see the bruises," said Majeske, of Livonia.

The center opened in 1997 and was licensed to care for 148 children. Childtime has been cited twice this year by the state for other violations.

Allison had been placed with Poole, 40, and her husband last summer because her parents, both substance abusers, could not take care of her.

Detroit News Staff Writer Ivey Perkins contributed to this report. You can reach Oralandar Brand-Williams at (313) 222-2027 or bwilliams@detnews.com.

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PLYMOUTH: Day care closed after allegations of ignoring abuse

NEWS IN A MINUTE: Wayne County

October 18, 2006

A day care facility has been shut down, a week after allegations surfaced that workers there failed to report signs of abuse on a 2-year-old girl whose foster mother now is charged in her death.

Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services, confirmed Tuesday that Childtime Learning was closed on Monday. The state will seek to revoke the center's license, due to expire next month.

An investigation following the complaint Thursday revealed violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and administrative rules.

Sorbet would not comment on whether the investigation was sparked by the death of Allison Newman, whose foster mother, 40-year-old Carol Poole of Canton, was charged earlier this month with felony murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter after the girl died Sept. 22.

The center, at 45678 Helm St., previously has denied the allegations. A news release issued Tuesday by spokeswoman Amy Popp stated the center is taking the necessary steps to reopen. In that statement, Popp denied allegations made by a former employee that signs of abuse against Allison were ignored by the center's staff.

Poole remains in custody and will be back in court next month for a hearing. She has denied harming the girl.

WXYZ

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URL: http://www.wxyz.com/wxyz/nw_local_news/article/0,2132,WXYZ_15924_5073261,00.html

Daycare License Suspended After Foster Child's Death

By Michael Rosenfield

Web produced by Sarah Morgan

October 17, 2006



Childtime Children's Center in Plymouth was shut down, Tuesday, under a state investigation that it might have prevented the death of a child whose foster mother is charged with killing her.

A former worker at Childtime claimed she raised a red flag about suspicions of abuse, but the center did nothing about it.

Two-year-old Allison Newman died in September and her foster mother, Carol Poole was charged with murder after the little girl suffered serious injuries at their Canton home.

The state said the daycare never reported anything suspicious, despite one worker voicing concerns.

Former daycare teacher Cher Majeske said, "We noticed that she had a few bruises that maybe were not common for a two-year-old. Because, I mean, two-year-olds come in with scratches and bruises all the time. They were a little suspicious."

Majeske said she told the daycare director what she saw, but nobody told police or the state.

The directors dispute allegations that they didn't respond appropriately.

Childtime spokeswoman Amy Popp released a statement saying, "As child advocates, we take child abuse very seriously and immediately launched an internal investigation which did not substantiate the claim."

As the center fights to get its license back, more than 100 families have to find a new daycare center.

Majeske said she's still grieving for Allison, "I think about it every single day. About her and how great Allison was, how much she had grown and I knew she would grow into an amazing person."

Within 30 days a judge will make a recommendation whether Childtime's license should continue to be suspended, be revoked, or given back. Then the state will have the final decision.

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Day Care To Close After Failing To Report Abuse

POSTED: 9:08 am EDT October 18, 2006

A local day-care center is at risk of having its license revoked after failing to report signs of abuse on a 2-year-old foster child.

Childtime Learning on Helm Street in Plymouth is being shut down because of allegations that the staff failed to report signs of abuse on 2-year-old Allison Newman.

Carol Poole, 40, a foster mother from Canton is charged with felony murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter after Allison died while in her care, police said.

Police are investigating.

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Michigan Report

October 17, 2006

COURT CUTTING WITHDRAWAL TIME IN PARENTAL RIGHTS CASES

Attorneys handling appeals for indigent parents in parental rights cases would have less time to withdraw from the case under rules being considered by the Supreme Court.

Current rules provide appellate attorneys appointed by the court 56 days to withdraw from the case if the attorney finds the appeal is frivolous. The proposed rules (ADM file Nos. [2006-07](#), [2006-08](#)) would cut that time to 28 days from an order terminating parental rights.

The proposed rules also would requires answers to motions for immediate consideration in the Court of Appeals to be filed within seven days for all cases. Those provisions would also allow the court to dispose of certain common appellate motions.

In another proposed rule change (ADM File No. [2006-03](#)), surety bonds posted for bail would be forfeit if the defendant does not appear for trial, but the bond issuer would not also be liable for court costs. Current language of the rule indicates the court could collect both the bond and additional costs.

The change also would eliminate the option for the defendant, within 28 days of having bail revoked, to show he or she had complied with the terms of release but was unable to appear in court as ordered.

Document seeks to disqualify Judge Wood from case

Editor's Note: The names of the parents and children involved in this case have been purposely omitted for their protection.

By Roland Stoy-Staff writer
THE DAILY REPORTER newspaper, Branch County, Michigan
Wednesday, October 18, 2-006

COLDWATER — A document filed in Probate Court seeks to have Judge Fred Wood disqualified from hearings regarding termination of parental rights and the subsequent potential adoption of a child by a couple, which has been working for his re-election campaign.

Delivered to probate court on Monday, the "motion and affidavit to disqualify" by assistant prosecuting attorney Terri Norris notes the proceedings of a case involving civil neglect dating back to March, days after the child was born.

According to the motion, a matter of public record, the biological mother retained custody of the child so long as she resided in a certain home, but when later living with individuals "not deemed appropriate," the child was placed in foster care under the Department of Human Services (DHS).

In August, the child was placed into a home where another child by the same mother had been adopted last year, as part of the department's sibling policy.

They are seeking to adopt the latter child, as well.

The couple, according to the motion, has "informed and advised the DHS that they actively endorse the incumbent judge in the probate court and have assisted in his campaign for re-election. These activities include television commercials, endorsements and written correspondence for publication."

It continues: "As a result of the political activity the current foster family has actively participated in concerning the presiding judge, coupled with the issue that this same family stands to potentially benefit should the petition be granted, the petitioner believes there would be an actual bias on the part of the presiding judge," reads the motion, which goes on to request Wood excuse himself from the case and that it be assigned by the State Court Administrator.

"I will rule on this," said Wood on Monday. "The DHS is not asking that I disqualify myself."

Wood referred The Daily Reporter to Shaun Culp of the DHS, as did Norris, who said the DHS was in agreement with the motion to disqualify.

Culp on Tuesday said he could not comment on the situation, and referred The Daily Reporter to the DHS Lansing office, where official Maureen Sorbet said she could not comment since she had not seen the motion.

A copy of the motion was faxed to her on Tuesday morning, and as of late Tuesday afternoon, she had not responded.

"If this were not an election year, this would not be a problem," said Norris. "(The DHS officials) said they were in agreement with the motion as in the best interests of the child."

She said that if a decision is issued by Wood, it might later be appealed on the basis of his relationship with the couple seeking to adopt the child, and the child's future would again be placed in "limbo."

Norris said that if Wood denies the motion, it will be appealed and Circuit Judge Michael Cherry called on to render a decision.

"We believe there's an actual basis for disqualification," said Norris. "(Wood and the couple) are so connected."

A hearing on the parental rights is scheduled for Dec. 1.



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Police: 14-Year-Old Fatally Shot By Teen Friend

Police Are Investigating

POSTED: 5:47 pm EDT October 17, 2006

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Police are investigating the shooting death of a 14-year-old.

Two teenagers, ages 14 and 16 years old, were at a Detroit home on Tuesday where there was a loaded gun, according to Detroit police.

The 16-year-old picked up the gun and managed to shoot the 14-year-old in the chest, according to police. The 16-year-old ran out of the house and screamed for help.

Emergency crews arrived at the home and transported the 14-year-old to a nearby hospital where he was

pronounced dead.

Detroit police homicide investigators are working on the case and trying to determine why the two teens were home in the afternoon.

The 16-year-old is being questioned by police.

Stay with Local 4 News and ClickOnDetroit.com for the latest updates on this developing story.

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Teen, 16, held for shotgun blast

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A 16-year-old Jackson boy is in custody after he fired a shotgun at his ex-girlfriend's mother Tuesday night, police said.

The teen, whose name is not being released, is being held at the Jackson County Youth Home. Police are seeking charges through the Jackson County Prosecutor's office for felonious assault and may ask for charges of attempted murder.

The woman told police she arrived home at her house in the 300 block of Wall Street about 8 p.m. She was at the front door when a single blast from the shotgun pelted the side of her house, said Jackson police Lt. Aaron Kantor.

"From our understanding, it appeared the shooting occurred from a significant distance," Kantor said.

The teen fled in a dark colored sedan, possibly with another person inside. The woman was not injured in the shooting, Kantor said.

An alert was issued to area law enforcement for the dark colored sedan. Jackson County Sheriff's Deputy Tony Shepherd stopped the vehicle about 10 p.m. on Francis Street near Wright Street.

The teen was taken into custody without incident.

"At this point in time the motive is in retaliation for an earlier shooting, at least that's what the suspect indicated," Kantor said. "The suspect proved to be the ex-boyfriend of this woman's daughter."

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Police say youth stabbed boy, 15, near bus stop

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

By Scott Hagen

shagen@citpat.com -- 768-4929

A teenage boy stabbed another teen this morning in Blackman Township while the two walked to the bus stop, police said.

The victim, a 15-year-old boy, was taken to Foote Hospital for two slashes and a stab wound to his leg. The 14-year-old suspect is being lodged at the Jackson County Youth Home.

Police are continuing to investigate the attack and are expected to seek assault with intent to commit great bodily harm, or assault with intent to murder charges against the teen.

"It appeared to be premeditated and there were numerous knife wounds," said township Public Safety Inspector Jon Johnston. "Despite the fact that this incident involved juveniles we do take fights involving weapons very seriously."

Police are not releasing the names of the boys because they are juveniles.

The two teens, who live in the Walnut Ridge manufactured-home community, were walking to the bus stop about 8 a.m. when they started fighting, Johnston said.

Both are students at Northwest High School. The two apparently had been involved in a fight earlier this week, Johnston said.

At some point the young boy pulled out a small hunting knife with a 3 1/2-inch blade and slashed the older boy and stabbed him in the leg, Johnston said.

Several other students at the bus stop witnessed the incident. The suspect fled before the bus arrived. The bus driver called police, Johnston said.

Officers with Blackman Township located the suspect at his home, and he was taken into custody. The victim was taken to Foote Hospital to receive stitches. He was expected to be released sometime today, Johnston said.

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Two juveniles apprehended for crimes

Grand Haven Tribune

GEORGETOWN TOWNSHIP — Two Georgetown Township area juveniles have been apprehended in relation to numerous breaking and entering, malicious destruction of property and larceny cases over the last two months in that eastern Ottawa County township.

The suspects, ages 12 and 13, are facing several felony charges in juvenile court, said Lt. Mark Bennett of the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department. The pair have been involved in about 10 incidents that resulted "in several thousand dollars of damage and loss," he added.

Information on the case surfaced when a deputy investigated a runaway report in which the two young suspects were involved, Bennett said.

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October 18, 2006

Homeless to cheer the Tigers

Nonprofit agencies roll out TVs, clothes, goodies to connect with those on street during World Series.

David Josar / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- Ralph Butler is a common sight in the city's Central Business District, where he forcefully hands out American flags on toothpicks and then asks for a donation.

"I can make 50 bucks on a good day, but when the World Series is in town, I'm really going to clean up," said Butler, 58, who is a veteran.

Just as the professional panhandlers are gearing up for the influx of fans, sportswriters and business people for the first game of the World Series on Saturday, so are the agencies that help the city's homeless, a population estimated at more than 13,000 in the last census.

The Detroit Health Department is banding with several nonprofit agencies for a summit today on what to do for the homeless during high-profile events.

The Detroit Rescue Mission, which sponsored Super Bowl parties for the homeless, is ready to spend about \$40,000 to do the same thing during the World Series.

"We're going to have two big-screen TVs," said Dr. Chad Audi, president of the Detroit Rescue Mission, which will sponsor a party at its Stimson Street facility for those who call the streets their home. "We're going to have racks of clothes and coats. We are going to have food and cookies, juice, pop."

About a dozen people who came to the mission's party during the Super Bowl have stayed off the street and several have found their way into permanent housing, Audi said.

Spurred into action by the Super Bowl, the city now has a comprehensive plan for helping the homeless during large-scale events, said Dr. Calvin Trent, director of the city's Bureau of Substance Abuse Prevention Treatment and Recovery.

"What happened at the Super Bowl didn't stop at the Super Bowl," he said.

In February, about 100 people crowded into the Neighborhood Service Organization's 24-hour Walk-In Center, on Third Avenue in the Cass Corridor, to watch the Super Bowl.

NSO spokesman Joseph Howse said his group plans to reprise those efforts during the World Series.

"Essentially, we're doing what we've always done at our 24-hour walk-in center, and that is to provide a safe haven for our homeless," he said.

Before the Super Bowl, a fundraising push helped the Detroit Rescue raise \$60,000, which was used to buy a van that is now on-call to the police department and sheriff to pick up homeless who need help, Audi said.

"People who are in need should not have a reason to be on the street panhandling or bugging other people," Audi said. "They'll have a place to celebrate and get help."

You can reach David Josar at (313) 222-2073 or [djoser@detnews.com](mailto:djosar@detnews.com).

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kalamazoo Gazette

October 18, 2006

Candidate's remarks raise concerns

I attended a forum recently at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Kalamazoo that featured about 10 of the local candidates seeking either election or re-election this November.

The major discussion at the forum centered around the issues of the proposed Housing Trust Fund, a countywide mass transportation system, immigration issues and last, but certainly not least, the homeless population.

For the most part, it was a good meeting. That is, until state Rep. Lorence Wenke, R-Richland, said that homeless people are in that position as a result of the choices they have made in their lives and, until people stop having children before marriage and without spouses, they will continue to have problems.

I approached him afterward. My issue with him was the single parent remark, as I explained to him that I was a single parent and a successful one. He told me that all he will say is that ``if you have children without a spouse, don't come to me for help."

Is that the kind of person you want to put into office? Someone who is pointing fingers at the homeless instead of trying to work toward solutions and having no compassion for his fellow human beings?

Terri Kennedy

Kalamazoo



Kids' flu shots delayed; no shortage, officials say

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

By Kyla King

The Grand Rapids Press

As news spread Tuesday that flu shots for kids 6 months to 3 years old could be delayed three weeks, health care providers were reminding people it was just a delay, not a shortage.

"The bottom line is it's OK to get it (vaccinated) in November and December and even beyond. You will be protected," said Cara Knapp, immunization program supervisor for the Kent County Health Department.

It only takes two weeks for the vaccine to be effective, so patients who get a shot in December will still be protected during the peak flu season, which usually lasts until March, Knapp said.

The best bet is to call ahead and make sure your doctor or provider has vaccine available, Knapp said.

The delay comes because Sanofir Pasteur, the largest maker of U.S. flu vaccine, said it is three weeks behind in its distribution schedule because of production problems. Some health care providers may not receive their full shipment until late November or early December.

The company's FluZone vaccine is the only injection approved for children six months to 3 years old.

The delay is not expected to affect adults since there are other types of vaccine from other manufacturers approved for older kids and those over 18.

Kent County Health Department spokeswoman Amy Morris said people should keep in mind that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is predicting there will be between 100 million and 110 million doses of the vaccine available this year.

In West Michigan, most providers have received an initial shipment, and some have more than others because there are multiple distribution channels.

"I think it feels somewhat random," said Sue Schryber, immunization supervisor for Ottawa County. "Some physicians are frustrated because they haven't gotten very much and others have gotten their complete order."

The situation does indeed appear to random.

For Spectrum Health, which gives out the vaccine through its Visiting Nurses Association, urgent care centers, and doctors offices, the delay is not having an effect, spokeswoman Ann Veltema said.

"It appears things are on track," Veltema said.

At Saint Mary's Health, most Advantage Health doctors, clinics and pharmacies affiliated with hospital have received at least a partial shipment of vaccine, said Bob DeYoung, a clinical pharmacist who coordinates medication distribution.

"We're waiting for that next shipment but we've been assured that we will get our full shipment," DeYoung said. "Some offices have given some and so far not run out, other offices are now waiting for more."



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Husband sought in attack on wife

Police say Ypsilanti Twp. man faces 7 felony charges

Wednesday, October 18, 2006

News Staff Reporter

Police say a 37-year-old Ypsilanti Township man stalked his wife even after she obtained a restraining order against him, tracking her down in Ann Arbor over the weekend and repeatedly ramming her car with his vehicle.

The woman was injured when her car struck a tree and overturned. Police said her estranged husband fled.

Now, the man - Shawn Lakeith Lacy - is charged with attempted murder, aggravated stalking, assault with a dangerous weapon, domestic violence and failing to stop at a personal injury crash. Police have obtained a warrant for Lacy's arrest but have been unable to find him since the incident occurred early Saturday.

Ann Arbor Police Detective Dave Monroe said Lacy exhibited violent and aggressive behavior toward his 49-year-old wife in the past. They separated after 10 years of marriage, and she obtained a personal protection order against him.

Monroe said Lacy found out his wife was at a home on Ann Arbor's west side early Saturday and confronted her there.

Lacy is accused of fleeing the scene, and the victim and a passerby called for help. The woman had serious but not life-threatening injuries, Monroe said.

Detective Sgt. Richard Kinsey said police have been seeking Lacy since the incident, and police spoke with him briefly on the phone, but they haven't been able to locate him.

Lacy is charged with seven felonies, and police said they consider him to be dangerous. His last known address is on Share Street in Ypsilanti Township.

Lacy is 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighs 200 pounds. He is known to drive the 1988 Ford Astrovan used in the incident, which likely has front-end damage and a license plate of 4GNK71. He also drives a 1995 blue Chevy Cavalier.

Anyone with information on Lacy's whereabouts is asked to call Monroe at 734-996-3281 or Ann Arbor Police at 734-994-2911.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or 734-994-6832.

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Adult foster care facility draws neighbor's ire

By Sean Delaney
Press & Guide Newspapers

DEARBORN HEIGHTS - The city of Dearborn Heights has filed an appeal with the Michigan Department of Human Services to revoke the license of an adult foster care facility located in the city's south end.

"We've received numerous complaints about this facility and have taken what we feel to be the appropriate legal action to have it shut down," said Dearborn Heights Mayor Dan Paletko.

The facility, located on Westpoint, east of Telegraph Road and south of Annapolis Road, was approved for a temporary license to operate as a halfway house by the state of Michigan in August with a maximum capacity of six residents.

According to the MDHS Web site, an adult foster care facility that has been licensed by the state is required to provide "24-hour personal care, protection and supervision for individuals who are developmentally disabled, mentally ill, physically handicapped or aged who cannot live alone but who do not need continuous nursing care."

"Under state law, no notification needs to be given to either the neighborhood or the city when one of these homes opens," Paletko said. "They're not required to notify anyone."

The lack of information about the home upset many residents and business owners in the area, including local resident Mike Taulbee.

"I'm concerned about how this home is going to affect the neighborhood and I wonder why it was allowed to open near a school — someone should have told us it was opening," Taulbee said. The foster care facility is located less than a half mile from Madison Elementary School.

However, Paletko said that the individuals who reside at the home are not hardened criminals or parolees. Instead, many suffer from a form of mental illness or impairment that may affect their behavior and are required to take medication.

"Most of them are very docile because of the medication," Paletko said. "But we discovered that some have refused to take their medication. Those are the ones that we're most concerned about."

Nearly 20 similar adult foster care facilities are currently in operation throughout the city of Dearborn Heights, according to the MDHS Web site, www.michigan.gov/dhs.

"Information about every facility in our database is available on our Web site," said Karen Stock, director of communications for the MDHS.

In July, Paletko wrote a letter State Rep. Jim Plakas (D-Garden City) to asking that the license granted to the Westpoint facility's administrator, Uchenna Ndubuisi, be revoked on the grounds that the home was in violation of several rules and regulations established by the state.

"A special investigation was initiated by the (MDHS), and our complaint was found to be justified," he said.

According to Stock, every complaint received by the MDHS is followed up by a thorough investigation after which the appropriate action is taken.

The investigation conducted by the MDHS at the facility revealed that staff members had failed to properly identify those individuals who refused to take their medication in medical documentation required by the state.

It was also discovered during the investigation that the facility's admission policy did not reflect the conditions of "Alzheimer's disease, dementia or senility" as being appropriate for the facility and didn't specify that individuals with head injuries, suicidal tendencies or a history of seizures are acceptable for admission.

A second violation was established when investigators reviewed the case files of three facility residents who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, suicidal tendencies and a head injury, respectively.

"These are some of the more common violations that occur," Stock said. "But there are a variety of other things that are monitored and reviewed during an investigation."

According to investigators, Ndubuisi acknowledged the violations and has submitted an "acceptable corrective action plan" following documentation of the violations.

"The corrective action plan must be acceptable to all parties and implemented within the licensing period," Stock said. "If not, the administrator's license to operate the facility can be suspended or revoked."

The plan submitted by Ndubuisi indicated that the admission policy would be revised and also addressed the need to provide in-service training for facility staff in the proper way to chart medication, as well as the procedure to follow when a resident refuses to take medication.

In the report issued by the MDHS following the initial investigation, the department recommended a continuation of the temporary license of the adult foster care facility, provided that the violations established during the investigation are corrected.

However, Paletko said that while the investigation was completed in August, the city continues to receive complaints about the facility.

Those complaints have included reports of panhandling in front of area businesses, soliciting drugs and attempting to sell stolen property.

In response, Paletko said that he urged Corporation Counsel Gary Miotke to file an appeal in late August with the MDHS to address the city's concerns with the findings of the investigation and the actions taken after it was completed.

"The mayor has been very proactive in seeking a solution to this ongoing problem, but we have not yet received a response from the state," Miotke said. "We're still waiting."

However, Ndubuisi said that he has continued to work with the state to ensure that the violations are corrected and doesn't why residents are upset.

"This is America," he said. "People have the right to live where they want and these people are no exception. They're still human beings."

For more information about adult foster care facilities, including those located in the city of Dearborn Heights, visit the Michigan Department of Human Services Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

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Madonna with daughter Lourdes (not adopted). (Courtesy of CNN.com)



Angelina Jolie with Maddox, adopted. (Courtesy of gossipin.com)

Kimberly Chou: Gaga for ethnic kids

Kimberly Chou

Posted: 10/18/06

Silly Madonna, always having to get her way with everything. It's one of the accepted perks of fame, that a celebrity scoops up certain allowances undreamt of by normal folk: ordering your staff to bring you room-temperature water, jetting to exotic countries by private plane, picking up impoverished Malawian youngsters along the way.

David Banda arrived in London yesterday from Malawi. At 13 months old he's already the star of a growing overseas adoption controversy, and as the newest addition to the Madonna/Guy Ritchie family, baby David better get used to the attention. Madge and her filmmaker husband found David at a Malawian orphanage on a recent trip to the small African country. According to various reports, Madonna had agreed to donate \$5 million for programs supporting orphaned children and an additional \$1.5 million to make a documentary publicizing their case. Her Raising Malawi project will not only be a child-care center providing food, shelter and education to 4,000 orphans, it will also have Kabbalah-related projects, a sect of Judaic mysticism with which Madonna is famously associated.

News wires and gossip sites initially focused on the couple's trip objectives, but Malawian government officials revealed that they planned on taking home a baby to boot. Law dictates that a couple must live in Malawi at least a year before being cleared for the adoption process; speeding through by pleading their case at the Malawi High Court, the Ritchies gained permission to take David back to London less than two weeks after they arrived.

Cue the outcry from human-rights activists now.

So what's the problem here? What's wrong with fancy, rich-Brit (one artificially so) white superstars swooping in on African children and saving them from a life of misfortune like some secular, modern-day missionaries?

One, Madonna and Guy have completely skirted adoption laws. Typically for international adoption, prospective adopters must spend (at least) one or two years in the country where they seek to adopt while being evaluated by child welfare workers.

Two, the infant isn't actually an orphan. Too poor to care for David after his wife died shortly after childbirth, Yohame Banda told The Associated Press the child had been living in an orphan care center in Mchinji, Malawi, when the baby first caught the Ritchies' eyes.

Though the baby's father claims he's happy the celebrity couple has chosen to adopt his kid (Banda told the AP last week, "I am very, very happy because as you can see there is poverty in this village and I know he will be very well looked after in America"), activist groups in Malawi and around the world are crying foul.

A representative of the Eye of the Child organization told the AP that one cannot buy a child the way one buys a house - no matter how rich the prospective buyer. African babies, Madonna has learned, are harder to obtain than deeds to centuries-old British manors.

Madonna and her people brought their case to the Malawian High Court Oct. 10; the court gave their okay a few days later, giving the prospective parents preliminary custody, but Madonna was not able to take the child out of the country when she left that Friday because of "legal procedural reasons," according to a statement by Madonna's publicist Liz Roseberg.

The purported method with which Madonna and husband Guy Ritchie "selected" their Malawi treasure was not unlike special treatment at upscale stores where some L.A. boutique is cordoned off to regular customers for an afternoon while some celebrity drops \$10,000 on ostrich-skin totes and cashmere coats in peace. But instead of some Rodeo Drive establishment, it's an orphanage in Malawi: Allegedly, the children of the care center were all brought out on display for the Ritchies. The famous couple subsequently chose their favorite.

Thousands of couples seek international adoption every year with less media attention.

Is Madonna getting more attention simply because she's a celebrity? Is this any different than what Angelina Jolie has been doing with her experiences with international adoption for years?

While Jolie is a marquee star, she's also a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations Refugee Agency and has promoted humanitarian causes around the world. Madonna - well, she has her causes (AIDS awareness, for one), but she's also known for calling attention to herself when there's a spotlight available (the "Sex" book, another example).

But the questions here aren't necessarily about Madonna's motives. The main debate is whether or not celebrity status paints loopholes for non-material things. Extra privileges. Think about it. Having first grab at multi-million mansions because you "know people who know people," having your hands on the Versace spring collection in advance because you're friends with Donatella, choosing the cutest

Malawian baby from an orphanage because you're one of the most famous pop stars in the world - which one of these don't belong?

Despite outside uproar, Madonna has obviously gotten her way; before David was flown into London's Heathrow airport, members of her entourage had been taking care of him at the upscale haunt they were staying at in the capitol city Lilongwe.

Madonna sent out a letter to news agencies yesterday afternoon, claiming she and her husband had started the adoption procedures months prior to their Malawi trip, they just hadn't told the world as they wanted to keep it a private matter. Believe her if you will. In any case, this episode doesn't just publicize the plight of Malawian children, as Madonna hoped, it makes you wonder what exactly is the cutoff line for celebrity bonuses. For everyone that thought the Kwame Kilpatrick deal with the Lincoln Navigator was a scandal, wow.

- Chou can be reached at kimberch@umich.edu.

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Thrift stores thrive as families struggle

Charities set up more clothing, furniture shops as ailing economy takes toll on working poor.

Christina Stolarz / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- After three weeks of sleeping on a thin, foam mattress on the floor of his bare Pontiac home, William Lomax was ready to upgrade to a bed.

His limited income kept him away from traditional furniture stores. But the 60-year-old retired auditor found help in a different form -- the Furniture Bank, a Pontiac nonprofit organization that provides free basic furniture and household goods to those in need.

Michigan's struggling economy is one reason that the Furniture Bank -- and other thrift organizations such as the Salvation Army and Society of St. Vincent de Paul -- are expanding throughout Metro Detroit.

Smaller, independent thrift stores also are flourishing, popping up in former retail sites and accompanied by fenced drop-off areas bulging with donated clothing, toys and household goods.

"I needed some help," said Lomax, who received a full-size bed, dishes, silverware and blankets from the group. "It's wonderful for people who are in need who really need a hand up, not a hand out."

For example, four thrift stores line a mile-long stretch of Gratiot in Clinton Township, creating a sort of bargain row reputation for the area. The three newest ones -- the Salvation Army, Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Community Thrift -- have popped up in the last year or so.

Organizers say more and more people are shopping at the stores because they have no choice.

"Because of hard times, people are looking to stretch their dollar a little bit more," said Patricia Kemp, spokeswoman for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Waiting list for basics is long

The Furniture Bank is looking to expand into Macomb County this winter and eventually into Wayne County, saying the need for basic housewares, such as beds and dining room tables, is growing among low-income families in those areas.

More customers have been visiting the warehouse over the last three years -- about 2,400 last year -- because of the down economy, said Colette Kelly, executive director of the Furniture Bank.

Also, this month has marked the bank's longest waiting list -- 650 families -- in three years. The waiting list is so long that the group has had to turn Macomb County residents away until a location is established possibly near Warren or Center Line, Kelly said.

"There's more of the working poor who are a paycheck away from financial crisis," she said. "If your refrigerator dies, no one has \$350 to buy a new one. If something goes wrong, there's nothing left over."

Like the majority of thrift shops, the items at the Furniture Bank are donated by people in the community, Kelly said. The only difference is that everything is given away to people who are referred -- about 300 a month -- from various human service agencies in Oakland County.

Besides the working poor, clients include fire victims, survivors of domestic violence and those who were formerly homeless, she said. Warehouse items are gone within a week, she said.

"It tells me that the outcome of people in need is a direct result of the economy," she said. "There are not enough jobs and not enough jobs at a living wage."

The Salvation Army of Southeast Michigan will be up to 24 thrift stores in Metro Detroit when a new one opens on Fort Street in Detroit later this month and another in St. Clair Shores in November.

The Society of St. Vincent DePaul is also adding to the mix, replacing its smaller thrift stores with "big box" ones. The group's new Westland thrift store became the biggest of its kind, at 22,900 square feet, in Wayne County when it opened in August.

In many cases, these giant stores are replacing former retail outlets such as Best Buy in Clinton Township and New York Carpet World in Waterford. St. Vincent de Paul operates 10 thrift stores in Metro Detroit.

However, the society also teams up with 250 area Catholic churches and other agencies to operate a referral program that gives qualified low-income people vouchers to receive free items from the thrift stores, said Ray Minton, vice president of thrift store operations for St. Vincent de Paul.

The society's referral program has jumped from donating \$28,000 in vouchers to help 350 people in July to nearly \$42,000 to help 512 people in September, he said.

"There's a lot of poverty out there because of the economy," said Nancy Panther, president of the St. Vincent de Paul Conference at Sacred Heart Church in Roseville. "With winter coming, I know we'll get calls from people wanting winter coats for their children."

"We hope we can fill that need."

Brand-new clothes or food?

While the economy has helped spur the recent influx of thrift shops and furniture banks, organizers say it comes with its advantages and disadvantages.

It fills a need for the increasing low-income families, but at the same time, it limits the amount of donated goods at a specific location because there are more options, Minton said.

The items in biggest demand at the majority of thrift stores and furniture banks are beds and items for children, Kelly said.

Waterford resident Robert Frick has frequently donated dishes, couches and chairs to the Furniture Bank because "it's a good place to come."

"It's stuff we don't need," said Frick, 82. "It's just nice."

If thrift shops weren't available to Candace Cary, 54, she'd rely on garage sales to get clothes and items for her Eastpointe home.

She said during a trip to Sunshine Thrift in Clinton Township that she understands that more and more people are relying on the discount stores because "you can't buy brand-new clothes on the money people make. There's no way they can do it and still feed their families."

Salvation Army officials like the fact that their store on Gratiot in Clinton Township is near the three other thrift stores.

"We think it helps because it creates a center for thrift shopping," said Colleen Kinney, director of community relations for the Southeast Michigan Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center. "It's increased our traffic."

Jerry Divozzo, general manager and owner of the for-profit Sunshine Thrift, agrees. Sunshine Thrift purchases items, such as clothing and small appliances, that are donated to the National Kidney Foundation of Michigan.

"People like to come and hit them all," he said. "If you have the time and the patience, you can make out so well."

"It's just unbelievable how far your dollar can get stretched."

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Child support payments in Allegan, Gratiot, Ionia, Kalamazoo and Saginaw counties going electronic

October 18, 2006

LANSING – The Department of Human Services' Office of Child Support, in coordination with the Friend of the Court in Allegan, Gratiot, Ionia, Kalamazoo and Saginaw counties, will begin disbursing child support payments through a debit card this month. A new law requires all child support payments to be electronically disbursed via direct deposit into a personal checking/savings account or to a debit card unless recipients meet hardship exception criteria.

The program is being implemented through a rollout process. Seventy-three counties have already transitioned to electronic disbursement. In October, Allegan, Gratiot, Ionia, Kalamazoo and Saginaw counties will implement the program.

Customers who currently receive paper checks in these counties have received information in the mail and were given the choice of direct deposit to their checking/savings account or to a debit card. Paper child support checks will no longer be sent out to customers unless they meet the hardship exceptions described in the law.

Before implementation of the law, about 30 percent of child support recipients in the state had their payments directly deposited into their personal checking or savings account. Customers currently participating in direct deposit are not required to switch to the debit card.

The new VISA debit cards, which will be issued at no cost to the customer, can be used like any other bank or credit union debit card at millions of locations that accept VISA debit cards - without incurring any fees. Customers can also get cash back with purchases from any of over 29,000 Interlink merchants in Michigan – again without fees. Customers choosing to access debit card funds using an automated teller machine (ATM) will be subject to ATM fees.

In states with electronic disbursement already in place, about two-thirds choose direct deposit to checking/savings and one-third choose direct deposit to debit cards.

Attached to this press release is an overview of electronic disbursement and a statewide implementation schedule.

For more information on electronic disbursement of child support go to the child support section of the DHS Web site, www.michigan.gov/dhs or to www.misdu.com.

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Michigan Department of Human Services Office of Child Support

ELECTRONIC DISBURSEMENT OF CHILD SUPPORT

- Public Act 548 of 2004 (MCL 400.236(4)) requires that the Michigan State Disbursement Unit (MiSDU) disburse support electronically, either through direct deposit to an individual's checking/savings account or to a debit card.
- One-third of Michigan's child support customers already have direct deposit. All customers will be offered a choice of either direct deposit to checking/savings or debit card. (In other states with electronic disbursement, statistics show that approximately two-thirds chose direct deposit and one-third received a debit card.)
- The debit card option will be phased into electronic disbursement during 2006. See the statewide implementation schedule.
- Electronic disbursement:
 - Provides immediate access to funds.
 - Eliminates mail delays and lost or stolen checks.
 - Eliminates check-cashing fees.
 - Eliminates returned mail and delays when customer has not updated his/her address.
 - Reduces money held by the state waiting for a customer to update his/her address.
 - Makes more efficient use of taxpayer dollars (better service, lower cost).
- Exemptions to electronic disbursement may be requested/granted for:
 - Individuals with a mental or physical disability that imposes a hardship.
 - Individuals with a language or literacy barrier that imposes a hardship.
 - Individuals with payments that are not recurring (two or less per year), or are not expected to continue in a 12-month period.
 - Individuals with both home and work addresses that are more than 30 miles from an ATM or their financial institution.
- When a customer chooses the debit card, the MiSDU deposits support payments directly to the card. The card can be used just like any Visa-branded card. (Only the MiSDU can deposit money into this account; the cardholder cannot add funds.)
- There is no fee to use the card at the millions of locations that accept Visa debit card for point-of-sale transactions (grocery stores, retailers, gas stations, etc.).
- Customers can also get cash back with purchase from Interlink merchants without any fee. There are over 29,000 Interlink merchants in Michigan.
- Each cardholder can also receive cash back free of charge from any bank or credit union that process Visa cash advances at the teller window.
- Customers who choose to use an ATM to access their debit card funds will pay ATM fees. Today, customers without checking/savings accounts have few alternatives to paying check-cashing fees.
- For additional information on electronic disbursement go to the child support section of the DHS Web site www.michigan.gov/dhs or www.misdu.com



Michigan Department of Human Services
Office of Child Support

**Electronic Disbursement of Child Support
Statewide Implementation Schedule**

MONTH*	COUNTY
2005 November	Pilot Counties: Muskegon, Shiawassee, Marquette
2006 January	Oakland
February	Huron, Lapeer, Livingston, St. Clair, Sanilac, Tuscola
March	Macomb
April	Genesee
May	Alcona, Alger, Alpena, Antrim, Arenac, Baraga, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Chippewa, Crawford, Delta, Dickinson, Emmet, Gogebic, Grand Traverse, Houghton, Iosco, Iron, Kalkaska, Keweenaw, Leelanau, Luce, Mackinac, Menominee, Montmorency, Ontonagon, Oscoda, Otsego, Ottawa, Presque Isle, Schoolcraft
June	Kent
July	Berrien, Branch, Cass, Hillsdale, Lenawee, Saint Joseph, Van Buren
August	Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Isabella, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Midland, Missaukee, Montcalm, Newaygo, Oceana, Ogemaw, Osceola, Roscommon, Wexford.
September	Clinton, Eaton, Ingham, Washtenaw
October	Allegan, Gratiot, Ionia, Kalamazoo, Saginaw
November	Barry, Calhoun, Jackson, Monroe
December	Wayne

*This is the month in which the first of the three notices is sent to clients asking them to return the request for direct deposit or a debit card will be sent. Within two weeks after the first notice, a second notice is sent to those who have not chosen direct deposit to request again that they choose direct deposit or receive a debit card. Approximately two weeks after the second notice, a third notice is sent to those who have not chosen direct deposit to let them know they will receive a debit card. They receive a debit card approximately one week after the third notice.